

# PREPARING FOR COLLEGE

by Krista Casale, MS, PCC, AAC, and  
Karen Hochheiser, MA, ACC

**A**S COLLEGE LIFE COACHES, we have supported hundreds of students with ADHD in successfully transitioning to college. No two transitions look alike. Students have varying degrees of support, confidence, resourcefulness, and tangible information that affect their personal journey from high school to college. While there is no exact formula, there is one key theme among all students who succeed: *They are open to understanding themselves.*

Students who are open to understanding their strengths, how their brain works, and what excites them can create a solid foundation that will allow them to thrive in college. Parents can help their future college student begin this process of self-reflection by asking the right questions and by helping their student pay attention to meaningful moments. The more students get to know themselves before entering college, the more opportunities they have to create systems that not only work but are transferable to all types of environments.

With this in mind, we compiled our list.

## The Top Three Things to Consider





### **Self-reflection should start early**

You may read this and think “*Yeah, right... my child?*” I know what you are thinking. You may have to remind your student to brush their teeth so the idea of having him sit down in a state of reflection sounds as possible as getting him to recite an entire Shakespeare play. Do not shake your head just yet. It is possible.

In our early meetings with college freshmen, we often hear them say “*My parents had to make me do my homework.*” Followed by, “*I can’t do it on my own. I always need someone to force me.*” These limiting beliefs do not allow space for students to think from a place of creativity and self-understanding.

Students may find the transition from a structured high school schedule to the unstructured nature of college very challenging. Therefore, it’s important for them to start discovering their own motivation and systems for studying, scheduling, and completing work apart from parental and external motivators. Self-reflection is a bridge to allow that to happen.

**TIPS FOR PARENTS:** When you see your student do something successfully, ask her about her approach. In our experience, parents typically say things like “*See I knew you could do it if you just focused.*” Or “*You are finally done? If you would have just gotten started you might have been done two hours ago.*” While these statements are shared out of love and wanting your student to understand the impact of her choices, they do not extend the learning process.

**Try asking questions like:** “*What helped you get started with that assignment?*” and “*What do you like about that organization system?*” “*If that worked, which part of that approach could you continue in the future?*” These questions offer brief moments of self-reflection that may allow your student to build connections and a deeper understanding of her internal process.



### Successful systems do not magically appear

There is a strange paradox that occurs in college where students forget to engage in the same activities, systems, and routines that once supported their success in high school. When students arrive on campus, they often expect these factors to simply appear and magically absorb into their lifestyle. Based on what we know about the ADHD brain, this makes sense. Students with ADHD have a tendency to think big-picture and get excited by long-term outcomes without planning the details. Here is an example of how this might look:

*A freshman has made the decision to attend Tulane University (Roll Wave!). He has always been strong in math and sciences and will undoubtedly major in pre-med. He loves running and cannot wait to find the running club on campus. He has always taken ADHD medication and has not considered how this will impact his college experience, because he found a rhythm that worked in high school.*

*Within two weeks, the student calls his parents with the following concerns. His math and science classes are harder than he expected, and he is considering changing his major. Due to having so much free time, he is having trouble focusing because he does not feel pressure to get things done, and he has missed a few assignments. He no longer has a set schedule and finds that his medication often keeps him up late at night, which results in his sleeping in and missing classes. He likes his running club but does not feel like it is bringing him joy. His days seem a blend of being overly tired, trying to motivate himself to complete his work, and always feeling behind.*

As professional coaches, when a student is in this headspace, the first thing we might ask is, “Can you tell me about your high school experience? What was your life like?” If we asked this question of the student above, we might have found out the following:

- *Math and science were easy for the student, but he always used to work with a private tutor. This was not because he had trouble learning the material, but because he likes to talk about things out loud.*

**Our thoughts:** He is a verbal processor. How can he incorporate this into his learning?

- *In high school, cross country practice required him to complete homework before 3 PM.*

**Our thoughts:** He works really well with schedules. Is there an opportunity to create more structure throughout his day?

- *He used to go for a run alone on the weekends when he needed to clear his mind.*

**Our thoughts:** College is stressful; where he is making time for this? He likes running alone. Maybe the running club is not fulfilling his needs because it is group-related.

- *In high school, he never missed assignments because his teachers had him write down his assignments.*

**Our thoughts:** Lists work for this student. How is he currently tracking his assignments?

This student will find the answers to all of his questions in his own responses. He is simply not aware of it yet! If this student uses facts of the past to inform how he is operating in the future, he can achieve many of the same results.

**TIPS FOR PARENTS:** Start having these conversations before a student arrives on campus. Talk with your student about what systems in high school supported him in being successful and how he can recreate that in college. If your student is in college and struggling, remind him of what worked for him in high school through small manageable details and asking questions. The clearer your student can get on what works for him and why, the more he will be able to implement this in various environments.

### Universities want students to succeed

College is a rigorous, soul-searching endeavor for most students. Not only are students being challenged academically, but they are also in the midst of finding their friend groups, living independently, and setting the foundation for the rest of their lives. No pressure, right?

Since college campuses serve thousands of students, identifying struggling students is challenging, and sometimes students form a misperception that colleges do not care about their success. It's quite the opposite! Abundant support services exist; the major difference from high school is that the onus is on the student to reach out for help.





The following resources can typically be found on all campuses:

- **Academic advising:** Provide support with scheduling of classes and university policies
- **Career centers:** Support students in building resumes, job or internship searches, networking, and connecting personal visions to career choices
- **Counseling:** Provide one-to-one and group counseling for students in need of mental health support
- **Accommodation centers:** Support students who may need accommodations, typically for students who had an IEP or 504 in high school or when new diagnoses present in college; assist in securing short-term accommodations for injuries
- **Tutoring centers:** Provide various forms of content tutoring for challenging academic courses

Specialty programs might include, but are not limited to:

- **Coaching programs:** Provide academic and personal one-to-one coaching. Coaching programs look different across university settings; coaching might be provided by professional staff and/or students. At Tulane, our life coaches are professional staff who are certified through the International Coach Federation and have specialized training in ADHD coaching through the ADD Coach Academy.
- **Peer mentorship programs:** Offer structured peer-to-peer academic and social support. These programs might be found under first-year programs,

multicultural affairs, the success center, living/learning communities, and residence life, to name a few.

**TIPS FOR PARENTS:** The level of support your student utilized in high school will most likely need to continue in college. For example, if your student regularly used a tutor, counselor, or met with her teacher one-on-one often, creating this level of support in college will be important. Each office typically has their own system of scheduling meetings. Encourage your student to email or call each office she is interested in utilizing to discover the best way to access their services.

Furthermore, if your student had accommodations in high school, she will need to apply for these accommodations in college. It can be a bit confusing, because each university might use different names for similar offices. Offices with titles such as the Center for Student Accessibility, Disability Services, Tutoring or Academic Learning Center, or the Success Center can be good starting points. From our experiences, it is ideal to reach out to these offices the summer before the start of college.

We already know what you are thinking: Your student is familiar with setting up these types of meetings and knows how to properly advocate for herself. We see it all the time! The good news is that professionals on college campuses understand that students come in with many questions, and they are excited to answer them. Remind your student that support services are available, because using these services is a part of the college experience and most successful students seek out these resources.

As coaches, we truly believe our clients are whole, resourceful, and creative. To believe this for themselves, they need a supportive space to tap into these strengths. The earlier students begin their self-reflection, the more equipped they are to advocate for themselves and tackle the challenges that come with transitioning to college. 🗣️

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**Krista Casale, MS, PCC, AAC**, serves as a senior success coach and is the creator of *The Story of Failure Program* at Tulane University. She received her graduate degree in counselor education from East Carolina University. A professional certified coach through the International Coach Federation and a certified university career coach through The Academies, she received ADHD-specific training through the ADD Coach Academy. Casale is a certified yoga instructor and created *Yoga Inspired Life Coaching*.

**Karen Hochheiser, MA, ACC**, is a senior success coach and manager of motivational interviewing training at Tulane University. She received a master of arts degree in postsecondary education from the University of Michigan and is pursuing a degree in counseling from Loyola University New Orleans. Certified through the International Coach Federation, Hochheiser completed her initial training through Coach U's Core Essentials Program. In December 2017, she became a certified holistic life, career, and executive coach through Goal Imagery Institute.

